



U.S. Department of Justice

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## **PRESS RELEASE**

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### **Former USAID Security Specialist Pleads Guilty To Falsifying Security Clearance Documents**

WASHINGTON – Donald Lerch, 38, a former security specialist for the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), pleaded guilty this afternoon to one count of making a false statement involving work he performed in carrying out background checks, United States Attorney Ronald C. Machen Jr. announced.

The Honorable Deborah A. Robinson, of the United States District Court for the District of Columbia, presided over the plea. Under voluntary federal sentencing guidelines, Lerch, of Warfordsburg, Pa., faces up to six months of imprisonment. Sentencing will occur before the Honorable Emmet G. Sullivan. A sentencing date has not yet been scheduled.

According to the government's evidence, Lerch falsified approximately 50 forms that were used in the processing of security clearances.

Lerch worked from November 2008 until April 2010 in the Background Investigation Domestic Division of USAID. He reviewed requests for security clearances for USAID personnel, including requests for top secret clearances. These duties included contacting law enforcement agencies, including the FBI, and requesting that they conduct records checks on individuals seeking clearances. Lerch provided the law enforcement agencies with USAID records check forms, which the agencies would later return with an official stamp that indicated whether the individual in question had a criminal record. Lerch also provided USAID reference check forms to the references of individuals seeking clearances. The references then would complete the forms, including signing their names, and return them to the defendant. After receiving these forms, Lerch would scan them into an electronic filing system at USAID.

In the summer of 2009, Lerch's caseload increased to approximately 35 to 40 cases per week. Beginning in November 2009, he decided to "short cut" the background investigation process to save time. He falsified USAID forms. For example, Lerch took USAID records check forms with bona fide law enforcement stamps from prior cases, cut out those stamps, and taped

the stamps to new forms to make it appear as though a law enforcement agency had conducted a records check. The defendant also took USAID reference check forms with bona fide signatures of references from prior cases, cut out those signatures, and taped the signatures to new forms to make it appear as though the references listed on the new forms actually signed them. He scanned these falsified forms into the electronic filing system.

In announcing today's guilty plea, United States Attorney Machen commended the outstanding investigative work of agents of the USAID Office of Inspector General. He also praised the efforts of members of the United States Attorney's Office, including Legal Assistant Jamasee Lucas and Assistant United States Attorney David Johnson, who is prosecuting the case.

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